

MEMBER NEWS

Focus on a Federation Member: The Wake County Historical Society

By Ray Hinnant, President, Wake County Historical Society

The Wake County Historical Society had its beginning at the North Carolina's Governor's Mansion. The Bloomsbury Chapter of the Daughters of the Revolution decided that it was important for Wake County to have an organization dedicated to historic preservation and education. This group sponsored a special meeting at the Governor's Mansion on November 19, 1956, to discuss the formation of a historical society. Five months later on April 9, 1957, an organizational meeting was held at the Department of Archives and History in Raleigh. The group decided to form The Wake County Historical Society. Attendees elected William Parker, president; Dr. C.C. Crittenden, vice-president; Mrs. H.B. Norris, secretary; and Richard Seawell, treasurer.

At first the society met twice a year. Meeting agendas included programs on various historical subjects in Wake County and North Carolina. As the membership grew, the meetings became more frequent.

Programs and Services

In 1964 the society published its first newsletter. Mrs. Elizabeth Reid Murray served as editor of the newsletter for five years. The newsletter has always been very popular with our members, providing them with news of upcoming programs, historical news, and research done by our members. Some of more prolific writers in the early days were Grady Carroll, Dr. Thornton W. Mitchell, Beth Crabtree, Vance E. Swift, and Elizabeth Norris.

Through the years the society has offered its members countless

"The Wake County Historical Society has had a tremendous number of projects over the last 57 years. One of our first major projects was the prevention of the demolition of the historic ca. 1810 Badger-Iredell Law Office in Raleigh."

programs on historical events in the South, and particularly North Carolina and Wake County. Society members have traveled to many historic buildings, mills, museums, and homes to hear about the architecture of the building or the historic event(s) that happened there or the collections of artifacts displayed there.

The society has also provided some outstanding lecturers who discussed various aspects of our history. One of the longest running programs provided by the Wake County Historical Society is the Labor Day tour of Raleigh's City Cemetery. This tour started about 45 years ago and is still offered today. Raleigh historian Betsy Johnson Shaw has been leading the tour for the last 37 years.

Trips to historic areas are another service provided by the organization. In the past the society has had trips to Danville, Winston-Salem, Edenton, Tarboro, Warrenton, Petersburg, and many other historic places. The society usually will have a local person leading part of the tour.

Major Projects

The Wake County Historical Society has had a tremendous number of projects over the last 57 years. One of our first major projects was the prevention of the demolition of

the historic ca. 1810 Badger-Iredell Law Office in Raleigh. Beth Crabtree worked with the Wake County Bar Association to eventually move the office to Mordecai Square. The society also raised money for the contents of the office.

The society published a historical map of Wake County, donated a showcase for the lobby of The Wake County Courthouse to display historic articles, and sponsored the publication of the Raleigh pictorial history *City of Oaks* by James Vickers. The society placed plaques honoring James Robertson, a pre-Revolutionary War hero; artist Jacob Marling; Governor Abner Nash; Attorney General Alfred Moore; Hephzibah Baptist Church, a county landmark; and the site of the first Wake County Court House.

The society worked with the Historic Hope Plantation Foundation to locate the grave of Governor David Stone (1770-1818). The grave is located in the Knightdale area. The project was coordinated by Mrs. Martha G. Robinson. Much of the research was done by Vance E. Swift.

The Wake County Historical Society worked with several groups to erect a tombstone for Adolphus Bauer in Raleigh's Oakwood Cemetery. Bauer was the architect of the Governor's

MEMBER NEWS

Focus on a Federation Member: The Wake County Historical Society

Mansion. A recent project by the society involved replacing the photo of Rachael Bauer on her tombstone. Society members have restored the tombstone of Jacob Johnson, father of U.S. President Andrew Johnson, in City Cemetery. The society also restored the table top tombstone of Mary Burges, one of the few table top tombstones still standing in City Cemetery. Another project in City Cemetery was identifying the location and placing tombstones on the graves of Martha Lane McKethan Brickell and Grizelle Lane Ryan, two of Joel Lane's daughters.

Restoration Efforts

Three large restoration efforts had their beginning in the Wake County Historical Society. Society President Mabel Dorsey led the fight to restore Yates Mill. Mabel and other society members had meetings, held fundraisers, met with many entities, and finally helped to start Yates Mill Associates. The society held the money for that group until it was incorporated and until it received its tax exempt status. Yates Mill Associates has done a tremendous job in restoring the old mill and establishing a park.

The second major restoration effort that began in the Wake County Historical Society was the restoration of the L.L. Polk House. Col. Polk was the first N.C. Secretary of Agriculture, founder of N.C. State University, editor of *The Progressive Farmer* magazine, and a national politician. Historical society members Mabel Dorsey, Tom Norris, Barbara Massenburg, Tom Jordan, and others led the restoration effort, gathering support and funds to save the house. Again,

this project soon grew too large for the society, so a separate group was formed to save the house. Today, the L.L. Polk House Foundation has done a wonderful job restoring Colonel Polk's home on Blount Street.

The third major restoration effort for the society was the restoration of Oak View Farm. In 1990 the house was run-down, and the farm was in general disrepair. Under the leadership of Barbara Massenburg and Earl Droessler, the society convinced the Wake County Commissioners that the farm house needed to be restored and made a part of the upcoming county park. A new group spun off to become Oak View Associates. Today Oak View is a wonderful teaching place about farm life in Wake County.

The Wake County Historical Society has a very rich history. In 1991 the North Carolina Society of Historians recognized the society's newsletter, *The County Courier*, with an award of special merit. The Federation of North Carolina Historical Societies awarded the society the Albert Ray Newsome Award in 1986 and 2013 for Outstanding Programs of Historical Activities. And in 2002 Capital Area Preservation gave the Wake County Historical Society, the State of North Carolina, and the L.L. Polk Foundation the Anthemion Award for the preservation of the L.L. Polk House.

Please Join Us

The Wake County Historical Society tries to provide something that all its members will enjoy. We have five to seven programs a year on some historic topic, a bus trip to a



The Wake County Historical Society's logo reflects its interest in the study and preservation of history and historic architecture.

historic location, a Christmas party, and an annual meeting. The society is looking for new members. If you are interested in joining the society, please see our website at www.wakehistory.com for an application.